

1 ELECTRONIC GAME ENHANCEMENT SYSTEMS AND METHODS

2
3 CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION

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5 This application claims the benefit of Provisional
6 Application Serial Number 60/248,039, filed 13 November
7 2000.

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9 Field of the Invention

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11 This invention relates to electronic games and to
12 systems and methods for enhancing electronic game
13 functionality.

14
15 Background of the Invention

16
17 Electronic games are enormously popular. The growth
18 in the market of electronic games is fueled by not only
19 consumer demands for new and interesting electronic games
20 but also innovations in the technology by which electronic
21 games are played. Advancements in electronic game
22 technology is marked as much by efforts to provide
23 inexpensive, hand-held electronic game device or personal
24 game devices and increased miniaturization of hand-held

1 electronic game devices as it is by improvements toward
2 networked gaming environments, improved means for providing
3 communication between electronic game devices and various
4 systems and methods for enhancing electronic game
5 functionality. Although the field of electronic games is
6 robust and dynamic, consumer needs for advanced technology
7 and new and improved electronic games continues to promote
8 advancements in this field of endeavor.

9

10 In this spirit, there is a need for new and improved
11 systems and methods for enhancing the functionality of
12 electronic games and for marrying electronic game
13 enhancement technology with consumer products and services
14 and advertisements.

Summary of the Invention

The above problems and others are at least partially solved and the above purposes and others realized in an electronic game enhancement system including an electronic game stored in first memory, electronic apparatus having an input device responsive to commands for accessing and playing the electronic game and an electronic component stored in second memory. The electronic component is for enhancing the electronic game. A consumer instrument is associated with a device containing the second memory. A data transfer system is associated with the electronic apparatus and the device for facilitating a transfer of the electronic component from the second memory to the first memory for enhancing the electronic game. The consumer instrument includes a consumer product, and the device is attached to one of the consumer product and packaging of the consumer product. In another embodiment, the consumer instrument is a service that is to be purchased, and the device is made accessible after a purchase of the service. In yet another embodiment, the consumer instrument is an advertisement, and the device is made accessible by way of the advertisement.

1 In a further embodiment, the invention provides an
2 electronic game enhancement system including an electronic
3 game stored in memory, electronic apparatus having an input
4 device responsive to commands for accessing and playing the
5 electronic game and an electronic component stored in
6 password-accessible memory. The electronic component is
7 for enhancing the electronic game, and a consumer
8 instrument is associated with a password to the password-
9 accessible memory. The electronic component is accessible
10 by the electronic apparatus in response to entry of the
11 password into the electronic apparatus with the input
12 device. In another embodiment, the password-accessible
13 memory is accessible in response to entry of the password
14 into a data transfer station such as a computer, and
15 wherein the electronic component is capable of then being
16 downloaded to the electronic apparatus and, more
17 particularly, to the memory that stores the electronic
18 game.

19

20 Consistent with the foregoing, the invention also
21 incorporates associated methods. One method of enhancing
22 electronic game functionality includes steps of providing
23 an electronic game stored in first memory and electronic
24 apparatus having an input device responsive to commands for

1 accessing and playing the electronic game and providing an
2 electronic component stored in second memory. The
3 electronic component is for enhancing the electronic game.
4 The method further includes associating a consumer
5 instrument with a device containing the second memory, and
6 associating a data transfer system with the electronic
7 apparatus and the device for facilitating a transfer of the
8 electronic component from the second memory to the first
9 memory for enhancing the electronic game. Associating the
10 consumer instrument with the device can include attaching
11 the device to one of a consumer product and packaging of a
12 consumer product. Associating the consumer instrument with
13 the device can also include permitting access to the
14 device, for instance after paying a fee for a service.

15

16 In still another embodiment of the invention, provided
17 is a method of enhancing electronic game functionality
18 including steps of providing an electronic game stored in
19 memory and electronic apparatus having an input device
20 responsive to commands for accessing and playing the
21 electronic game and providing an electronic component
22 stored in password-accessible memory. The electronic
23 component is for enhancing the electronic game. The method
24 further includes associating a password to the password-

1 accessible memory with a consumer instrument and then
2 obtaining the password from the consumer instrument. The
3 password-accessible memory can be part of the memory of the
4 electronic apparatus or other memory accessible by way of
5 another device or computer having an input device. If the
6 password-accessible memory is accessible by way of the
7 electronic apparatus, the present method provides entering
8 the password into the electronic apparatus with the input
9 device for gaining access to the password-accessible memory
10 and enhancing the electronic game with the electronic
11 component. If the password-accessible memory is accessible
12 by way of device other than the electronic apparatus, the
13 present method provides entering the password into the
14 other device with its input device for gaining access to
15 the password-accessible memory and then transferring the
16 electronic component from the password-protected memory to
17 the memory of the electronic apparatus by means of a data
18 transfer system. This data transfer system is associated
19 with the electronic device and the other device or computer
20 and can be any system that is capable of transferring data
21 from one memory to another memory. Associating the
22 password to the password-accessible memory with a consumer
23 instrument can include at least one of attaching the
24 password to one of a consumer product and packaging of a

- 1 consumer product, permitting access to the password after
- 2 paying for a service, incorporating the password with an
- 3 advertisement and affixing the password to a receipt.

1 BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

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3 Referring to the drawings:

4

5 FIG. 1 is a schematic representation of an electronic
6 game architecture, in accordance with the invention.

1 DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF A PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

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3 The invention is concerned with electronic games

4 having electronic characters or features that the player of

5 the game can control for the purpose of achieving a

6 predetermined objective. This is typical of most

7 electronic games and illustrative of many such characters

8 or features include special powers, characteristics,

9 weapons, ammunition, tools, devices, options, equipment,

10 and other electronic items or attributes that help the

11 player to progress through or otherwise develop the game.

12 Some electronic games reward periodic successes with

13 additional instrumentalities, which are required to

14 progress through the game or otherwise help a player

15 progress through the game. In other instances, a player

16 may simply require a new instrumentality in order to

17 progress through the game. In this vein, the invention

18 provides a way that players can obtain instrumentalities

19 needed to progress through an electronic game, which is

20 played by a computerized device such a personal game device

21 (PGA), a computer, etc.

22

23 Turning now to FIG. 1, a schematic view of an

24 electronic game architecture 10 is shown. Architecture 10

1 includes electronic game apparatus 11 having a processor
2 12, a display 13 and an input device 14 such as a pointing
3 device, a keypad or keyboard, a joystick, a wheel, etc.
4 Apparatus 11 is capable of enabling a user to play an
5 electronic game 31, and input device 14 provides a user
6 with the ability to interact with electronic game 31.
7 Apparatus 11 includes a hand-held electronic game device or
8 personal game device (PGD), a modular game system of a type
9 that is used in connection with a monitor or television, a
10 personal computer, a laptop computer or any device or
11 system that is capable of enabling a user to access and
12 play an electronic game that is facilitated by game
13 software 17. As is the case with virtually every device or
14 system that is capable of enabling one or more users to
15 play an electronic game facilitated by software, apparatus
16 11 functions in accordance with a suitable operating
17 platform and is preferably provided with storage or memory
18 15 or with access thereto which houses game software 17,
19 and that may be used for storing an electronic game in the
20 course of play. Apparatus 11 is also furnished with a
21 drive 16 for accommodating data cartridges, diskettes
22 and/or compact discs for facilitating access to software
23 embodied and stored in digital or analog media memory, and
24 memory 15 can include, either in total or in part, the

1 storage capability provided by any such cartridge, diskette
2 or compact disc. In a particular embodiment, apparatus 11
3 is capable of playing electronic games in a networked
4 computer environment such as the Internet. In this case,
5 memory 15 can include resident memory and/or central memory
6 and apparatus 11 is configured with a browser application
7 and other conventional wares and software for facilitating
8 network 19 access and negotiation and these features will
9 readily occur to those skilled in the art.

10

11 Set forth for purposes of orientation and reference in
12 connection with the ensuing detailed description of the
13 preferred embodiment of the instant invention, the
14 foregoing brief description of electronic game apparatus 11
15 is intended to be generally representative of typical
16 dedicated and non-dedicated electronic game devices and
17 computers and game systems. Details not specifically
18 illustrated and described will be readily understood and
19 appreciated by those skilled in the art.

20

21 The invention proposes providing certain game
22 instrumentalities or components to electronic games in the
23 form of an "attachment" to a consumer instrument 20, which
24 is at least one of a product 21, a service 22 and an

1 advertisement 23. As a matter of example, product 21
2 includes any consumer product such as a car, a food
3 product, a clothing product, a video, a compact disk, a bag
4 of potato chips, a candy bar, a book, a magazine, a bag of
5 pet food, a newspaper, and otherwise any perishable and
6 non-perishable consumer good. Service 22 includes
7 restaurant services, movie theater services, personal
8 training services, carpet cleaning services, tanning
9 services, car wash services, and otherwise any service by
10 which consumers may purchase. Advertisement 23 includes
11 printed and broadcast advertisements including newspaper
12 advertisements, magazine advertisements, radio
13 advertisements, televised advertisements, etc. In
14 accordance with the invention, only by purchasing a product
15 or service or by accessing an advertisement may a player
16 obtain an electronic game component.

17

18 In this regard, the invention provides attaching at
19 least one game component 30 to consumer instrument 20 and
20 more can be attached if desired. Game component 30 is
21 considered one that a player needs or desires to play a
22 predetermined electronic game 31 or to otherwise progress
23 through an electronic game that is facilitated by game
24 software 17, which can be any game software. In an

1 exemplary embodiment, component 30 is housed in a memory
2 device 32, which is removably attached to a consumer
3 product or to the packaging of a consumer product, or
4 otherwise provided to a customer by a merchant in the sale
5 of or otherwise upon the completion of the sale of a
6 product or service. The physical attaching can be
7 facilitated with a mild adhesive, and packaging can be
8 modified to accommodate and hold device 32 in any desired
9 manner. Memory device 32 includes a data cartridge,
10 diskette or compact disc or the like that houses component
11 30 in the form of software that may be downloaded to
12 apparatus 11 for the purpose of essentially upgrading game
13 software 17 with the functionality provided by component
14 30. The data transfer between memory device 32 and
15 apparatus 11 is facilitated by a data transfer system 33,
16 which, in this embodiment, includes a conventional and well
17 known data transfer architecture between a data cartridge,
18 diskette or compact disc and drive 16 such as any one of a
19 variety of forms presently known and used in connection
20 with virtually every computer and game device. Downloading
21 of the component 30 from device 32 can occur upon docking
22 or loading with drive 16 or in response to user commands
23 entered at input device 14 after docking or loading and any
24 downloading event may be carried out in either fashion in

1 any embodiment of the invention. More likely than not, a
2 downloading event will usually take place and be
3 facilitated in response to user inputs or commands.

4

5 Those of ordinary skill will readily appreciate that
6 the art is replete with various systems and methods for
7 facilitating data transfer between electronic components
8 and, more particularly, from one storage or memory device
9 to another storage or memory device including wired and
10 wireless data transfer architectures, display-to-display
11 data transfer architectures, encoded data stream systems
12 that facilitate data transfer between opposing displays or
13 electronic devices, etc. In the case of a hand-hand game
14 device, the invention contemplates that a user may take his
15 or her hand-held game device to a place of business where a
16 product or service is to be purchased. Upon completion of
17 the sale, the invention provides that the user will be
18 given access to memory device 32 for the purpose of
19 interacting with it and downloading component 30. Memory
20 device 32 may be housed in a computerized kiosk or other
21 form of data transfer station 36, and data transfer system
22 33 can include any variety of system, including the
23 formerly described data transfer system, capable of
24 facilitating a downloading of component 30 from memory

1 device 32 such as by docking the hand-held game device into
2 a data transfer serial port, by initiating a wireless data
3 transfer such as between a display of the hand-held device
4 and a reference display at the data transfer station, etc.
5 Depending on the type of data transfer architecture
6 employed, those of ordinary skill will readily appreciate
7 that the invention may be configured with any necessary
8 systems and apparatus for facilitating any suitable form of
9 data transfer between memory devices.

10
11 In another embodiment, consumer instrument 20 includes
12 a document 40, such as a receipt from the sale of goods or
13 services, which is provided to a consumer after the
14 purchase of one or more goods or services. Document 40 is
15 furnished with a password 41 that a user can, for instance,
16 input into apparatus 11 for the purpose of unlocking
17 component 30' from password-protected memory 35 of memory
18 15 or of other memory such as that accessible over network
19 19 by way of a publicly- or privately- accessible web site,
20 or other password-protected memory such as that accessible
21 by way of a data transfer station 42 or computer or the
22 like provided by a merchant of goods or services. Document
23 40 can be incorporated into a printed advertisement, and
24 also conveyed in the broadcast of radio and television

1 advertisements. A token that is capable of providing
2 access to password-protected memory 43 may also be issued
3 at the completion of a sale of one or more goods and
4 services. The token can be of a type that is actually
5 inserted into data transfer station 42 for actuating
6 station 42, much like a coin-operated vending machine. In
7 other embodiments, the token can be of a type that
8 incorporates a magnetic strip that is to be swiped through
9 a magnetic code recognition device, or a type that issues
10 access to password-protected memory 43 in response to an
11 electronically-facilitated wireless recognition event.

12

13 The invention thus provides new systems and methods
14 for enhancing electronic game functionality, and for
15 adding, activating and unlocking electronic game
16 functionality, characters and player powers and abilities.
17 By associating components of electronic games with
18 products, services and advertisements, it is envisioned
19 that consumer activity will be enhanced and that consumer
20 spending will benefit and be caused to flourish. In
21 accordance with the invention, an electronic component of
22 the invention can be in the form of data that is
23 transferred or otherwise downloaded to apparatus 11 by any
24 conventional data transfer mechanism, or otherwise

1 accessible by way of a password, token, etc. A component
2 obtained by a user in accordance with the invention can be
3 programmed to last indefinitely or for a predetermined
4 period of time, after which the player may be required to
5 re-obtain the component as herein specifically described.

6

7 The invention has been described above with reference
8 to one or more preferred embodiments. However, those
9 skilled in the art will recognize that changes and
10 modifications may be made to the described embodiments
11 without departing from the nature and scope of the claimed
12 invention. Accordingly, any such changes and modifications
13 to one or more of the embodiments herein chosen for
14 purposes of illustration are intended to be included within
15 the scope of the invention as assessed only by a fair and
16 reasonable interpretation of the ensuing claims.

17

18 Having fully described the invention in such clear and
19 concise terms as to enable those skilled in the art to
20 understand and practice the same, the invention claimed is: